

Compass points to US as Paddy Power owner lines up new chairman

The FTSE-100 gambling giant behind Paddy Power is lining up a US-based businessman as its next chairman – a move that will further cement plans to abandon its presence on the London stock market.

Sky News has learnt that Flutter Entertainment, which also owns SkyBet and Betfair, is in advanced talks to appoint John Bryant to the role.

Mr Bryant, who is the senior independent director at Compass Group, the listed contract catering company, holds dual Australian and US nationality.

He sits on the boards of two US-based companies – Ball Corporation and Macy's – and is understood to spend the majority of his time in America.

A person close to the process said Mr Bryant's appointment was at an advanced stage, but cautioned that it had yet to be finalised.

This weekend, it was unclear whether other candidates remained in discussions with the group.

Flutter's annual shareholder meeting takes place later this month, which one investor suggested would be a logical time for the company to unveil its next chairman.

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The £26bn company, which also owns Foxbet and Pokerstars, said in February that it was exploring seeking a US listing for its stock because of the growing importance to the group of FanDuel.

It anticipates the US-based operation becoming its “largest business by revenue and an ever-greater proportion of its overall value”, the company said.

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Flutter said the move would give it access to “much deeper

capital” markets and would enable it to retain American talent more easily.

Shareholders will vote on the proposal this month, although the company has said “early feedback has been supportive”.

The move to optimise its listing structure is the brainchild of Peter Jackson, Flutter’s chief executive, who has presided over a steep increase in the company’s value.

That growth in earnings and share price has been delivered despite the threat of increased regulatory intervention, with the government expected to publish draft legislation that will include a new statutory levy later this month.

While Flutter has not explicitly said that it plans to ditch its London Stock Exchange presence, the likely move to seek a primary listing in New York is widely expected to lead to that outcome over time.

The company’s plans have sparked a renewed debate about the attractiveness of the London Stock Exchange to multinational companies during a drought of sizeable City flotations.

That issue has been brought into sharp focus by the decision of SoftBank, owner of the giant British chip designer Arm Holdings, to take the company public in New York rather than London, despite intensive lobbying by UK government ministers.

CRH, the building materials group, has also announced plans to shift its primary listing from London to New York, while it also said this week that it would abandon the Irish Stock Exchange.

Other London-quoted companies with significant US operations, including Pearson, have signalled that they may be open to transatlantic moves in future.

Sky News reported in January that [Flutter had engaged the search firm Russell Reynolds Associates](#) to identify Gary

McGann's successor as chairman.

The search will represent the latest boardroom change at a company which now ranks among the 30 largest listed companies in Britain.

Flutter recently named Paul Edgecliffe-Johnson as its new finance chief, replacing Jonathan Hill.

Mr McGann joined the Flutter board in November 2014, meaning he would no longer be deemed independent under the City corporate governance code by the end of this year.

Andy Higginson, the former Tesco executive, had been touted as a potential long-term replacement for Mr McGann several years ago but he stepped down from the Flutter board last year, opting to become chairman of JD Sports Fashion, the retail group.

A Flutter spokesman declined to comment.